

# STRANGE FRUIT

Lewis Allen

Southern trees bear strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,  
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.



1. What is the song about ?
2. Pick out the positive elements related to the South.
3. Pick out the words that are associated to these positive elements.  
What is the effect produced ?

## Indications on the song's history:

While many people assume that the song "Strange Fruit" **was written** by Holiday herself, it actually began as a poem **by Abel Meeropol**, a Jewish schoolteacher and union activist from the Bronx who later set it to music. Disturbed by a photograph of a lynching, the teacher wrote the stark verse and brooding melody under the pseudonym Lewis Allen in the late 1930s. Meeropol and his wife Anne are also notable because they adopted Robert and Michael Rosenberg, the orphaned children of the executed communists Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

"Strange Fruit" **was first performed** at a New York teachers' union meeting and **was brought** to the attention of the manager of Café Society, a popular Greenwich Village nightclub, who introduced Billie Holiday to the writer. Holiday's record label refused to record the song but Holiday persisted and recorded it on a specialty label instead. The song **was quickly adopted** as the anthem for the anti-lynching movement. The haunting lyrics and melody made it impossible for white Americans and politicians to continue to ignore the Southern campaign of racist terror. (According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, between 1882 and 1968, mobs lynched 4,743 persons in the United States, over 70 percent of them African Americans.)

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/film.html>